

Education In The North, University of Aberdeen. Issue: 18, Vol: 2 (2010)

Book Reviews

---

**Youth Work Practice, BASW Practical Social Work Series: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition**

**Tony Jeffs & Mark. K. Smith (eds.)**

**Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan (2010) pp. 208 Pbk. £17.99**

**ISBN 9780230543027**

---

Reviewed by Sarah Kearns, Lecturer, School of Education, University of Aberdeen

This book is a worthy successor to Jeffs and Smith's previous core text - 'Youth Work' (1988). It provides a thoughtful and challenging yet practical update on this complex and diverse area of practice. Its inclusion again within the BASW Practical Social Work series, which attracts readers from a wide range of settings within the human services, highlights the position of youth work at the interface of key professional identities - education, social work/social care, health, community learning and development.

The themed chapters, thirteen in all, examine the evolving context of youth work in recent decades, and project the future through reflection on what is central to sustaining its key aims and processes. In the introductory chapter the editors explore the volatility of youth work within rapid shifts in policy, and increasingly managerial discourses, highlighting the core values of mutuality and respect as the bedrock which has sustained it. It is heartening to see a strong emphasis throughout the book on the dimension of 'relationship'. Chapters 2 - 4 (Blacker, Smith, Collander-Brown) take up a range of perspectives on the complexities of 'being with another' (p. 53), examining the aims of the professional relationship and the need for the youth worker to engage consistently with a self-reflexive approach in addressing the inherent dilemmas. Pertinent to this is the need, highlighted in chapter 12 (Pugh), for both the practitioner and the organisational culture to promote self-care in managing the demands of youth work, and in maintaining belief in the potential for change. Chapter 8 (McLeod) adds

usefully to the focus on relationship through her discussion of mentoring, as does Howard Nurden (Chapter 10) in his account of working with spirituality.

Dod Forrest (Chapter 5) offers a broader view of youth work as engaging with collective social action. He examines the notion of 'empowerment' as particularly crucial in challenging the current dominant discourse of 'problematized' youth, i.e. prescriptive policies aimed at controlling specific 'problem' areas. In chapter 9 Gill Patton also emphasises the collective dimension through the potential for group work to promote democratic processes and participation in community and political institutions.

Chapter 6 (Gilchrist) and Chapter 7 (Harte) examine the concepts of 'education' and 'learning' embedded in the programmes and activities of youth work. How learning may take place at many levels, and the risks attached to prescriptive or tokenistic views of education are effectively highlighted. However it is concerning that on occasions a stereotypical view is presented of the differences between 'formal' education/ curriculum in schools, and the 'informal' education offered through youth work. Finally, Gill Millar (chapter 11) and John Rose (chapter 13) grapple with the tensions around managing and assuring the quality of youth work programmes, highlighting the need to fight for recognition of the value of informal processes within managerial structures which favour prescribed outcomes. The editors' concluding section offers hope for the continuing resilience of youth work through its adaptability and belief in social change through personal relationships, association and the power of collective action. The recent dramatic changes in political and economic climate will no doubt offer a further challenge to this resilience.